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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses issues of feminist implementation in teaching college composition, focusing on the difference between creating an equitable classroom environment versus imposing a specific point of view. It begins by discussing the difference between feminist pedagogy and feminist activism. The paper then suggests that a successful feminist pedagogy utilizes feminist leadership, which calls upon the leader to empower members of the group, to de-center the position of authority whenever possible, and to recognize and maximize members' interests and strengths. The paper concludes that what matters in feminist pedagogy is that the teacher be critical of his/her own pedagogy and also that he/she encourage and nurture students to become involved in the pedagogy and their own education. (Contains 15 references.) (EF)

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Feminist Composition Pedagogy: Sylphs Teaching with Hexed Tongues

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> *"Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence."*
>
> *Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Feminist pedagogy speaks to teachers who have found teaching to be their hearts' desire, teachers who genuinely like their students, and who are enraptured with the wonder of the exchange. Teachers who are hooked, like heroine addicts, on the energy of the classroom and the amazing things that happen there: the stretching of minds (their own and their students'), the widening of perspectives (their own and their students'), the blissful exercise of articulating new thoughts for an interested audience.

Feminist pedagogy is about creating a classroom community of learners who feel empowered and responsible for their own education, giving students authority to make their own choices and find their own way with gentle guidance from the teacher, critically examining each pedagogical decision that is made on behalf of that community (involving the community in those decisions when possible), and acting as facilitator instead of authority figure. Feminist pedagogy, therefore, is very different from feminist activism. Feminist activism is about actively working to make the world a better place for, work towards the empowerment of, women and other minorities (sic.). Feminist activism focuses on advancing a specific political/social agenda and working against a patriarchal, oppressive agenda. Feminist activism is about taking a single issue and doing all you can do to change the culture, the law, the patriarchal structure as it relates

to that issue. Or several issues. No feminist activist I know works towards only one goal or issue, unless that goal is a more woman-centered world or a general deconstruction of the phallocentric, patriarchal culture. In my experience, every feminist activist is deeply committed to several different causes, all of which work to empower the traditionally disempowered.

This is the one area where feminist activism intersects or overlaps feminist pedagogy: they both work towards empowering the traditionally disempowered. With feminist pedagogy, teachers give back authority to the members of the community. Feminist teachers give students back the power to make choices for themselves. There is a commitment by feminist pedagogues, or at least by this feminist pedagogue, to try to change the culture of academia to incorporate more feminist pedagogy and deconstruct traditional pedagogy that disempowers students and places the teacher as the center of knowledge and power. It would seem likely that many people who self-define as feminists enact feminist pedagogy. But one must be careful. Being a feminist does not automatically make one a feminist pedagogue. And many people who enact feminist pedagogy as described in this book would never self-define as feminists. In fact, it is very possible for someone to enact many aspects of feminist pedagogy and actively work against feminist activism within the larger community or culture.

Likewise it is possible for a dyed-in-the-wool feminist activist to believe she is enacting feminist pedagogy when in fact she is just imposing her politics on her students in the name of feminism. This type of feminism is not only autocratic, but oppressive. In this situation, a person (albeit a feminist) is taking advantage of a power situation where she has control over a captive, disempowered community and attempting to show them the light of feminism, privileging the feminist perspective over all other perspectives in the classroom. When a feminist activist

privileges her feminist views in her classroom, she becomes the oppressor. As Freire writes, "How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of the in-group of 'pure men' (sic.), the owners of truth and knowledge, for whom all non-members are 'these people' or 'the great unwashed'? . . . How can I dialogue if I am closed to -- and even offended by -- the contribution of others?" I have seen Freire's words come to fruition when a teacher with feminist, Marxist or other types of social/political activist philosophies enters a classroom and, conscious or not, imposes that agenda or perspective on their students. Imagine a revivalist meeting where you arrive thinking you are going to attend a lecture on "religions of the world." In fact, when the tent flaps close, you are expected to see the light of Jesus and accept Christ into your heart to be saved. Sneaky. Annoying. And because you have been tricked, the last thing you are going to do is listen to the preacher or accept Jesus as your personal savior, no matter what your inclination may have been before the lecture/revivalist meeting. That is what it is like when feminist activists teach with the agenda of showing their students that feminism as the way, the truth, and the light.

If you find yourself being drawn to feminist pedagogy because you have a desire to enact your core feminist beliefs and principles (empowering the traditionally disempowered) in the classroom, great. If you find yourself drawn to feminist pedagogy because you need to feel you are doing your part to educate people regarding the feminist agenda, to point out the oppression of the patriarchy, so your students with then become disciples of feminist principles and change the dominant culture, stop. Feminist pedagogy is not feminist activism. If you need activism, join the local chapter of the Feminist Majority or the NAACP or Citizens for Equal Protection. Don't impose your need for activism on your students. If you feel the need for activism (and you should

if you consider yourself a feminist), get out of the ivory tower and do your feminist activist work in the streets, in the legislatures, in the courts. Don't expect your feminist activism to trickle down through your students who will then take it to the streets.

Long before I was a feminist teacher I was a feminist activist. I have organized rallies and held press conferences; I have spoken to solemn groups at vigils and spewed fiery rhetoric at senators. I have testified at legislative hearings and counseled women who were trying to find the courage to flee batterers. I have coordinated state-wide feminist organizations and small, local radical guerilla groups. I am usually one of the first and loudest when it comes to lifting a voice for a feminist issue or cause. I am often in trouble because of this. The words I live by as a feminist activist are, "If someone isn't mad at me, I'm not doing my job. I don't care what is easy. I have to do what is right." This is how I enact my feminist activism. In my classroom communities, however, I am not a feminist activist. I am an educator and facilitator. My students may know I am a feminist. My students may know (or think they know) my stance on certain issues we discuss in class. But I am constantly checking and re-checking myself so that my feminist activist agenda is not privileged in the classroom community. No one will allowed to communicate a racist (or something that can be interpreted as racist) idea without being challenged. Likewise, no one will allowed to communicate a racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, ageist idea without being challenged. But the challenge will be gentle and invite the students to reflect on a different perspective. "How would a person who has experienced real discrimination because of racism hear that comment? What would they say to that?" If I privilege my perspective, the feminist perspective, above any other perspective in the classroom community, I am not truly entering into a dialogue or discussion with the community. Critical thinking is not

about presenting one way, the right way. It is about presenting a variety of perspectives and opinions and allowing each person to come to their own understanding of the issue or situation. If I use my power position as the teacher to impose my perspective, I become the oppressor instead of working to empower students. To quote Freire again, "It is only when the oppressed find the oppressor out and become involved in the organized struggle for their liberation that they begin to believe in themselves. This discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis" (47).

If a tenet of feminist pedagogy is teaching students critical thinking skills (reflection), the feminist teacher is providing students with one element needed for liberation. It is then up to the student to turn that reflection into praxis. By imposing or privileging a specific agenda or philosophy on a classroom community, the teacher is denying students the opportunity for reflection (there are no other options to reflect on) and thereby enacting the role of oppressor. Feminist pedagogues who use their classroom as a site for their own feminist activism (unless, of course, the class is a women's studies class where activism is an element of the course description), are violating this important tenet of feminist pedagogy. Some feminist activists who are teachers will argue that there is no such thing as a neutral classroom; every classroom has a political agenda that reflects the teacher's ideology. That is absolutely true. But the objective should always be to work towards a neutral position, always checking our own political agenda and how it is being enacted in the classroom so that it is not privileged over other perspectives. Students should not have their education repeatedly disrupted by the clatter of a feminist soap box anymore than they should have to be subjected to a classroom where capitalism and

consumerism is the unacknowledged, unchallenged, or, in fact, transparently celebrated, agenda.

That being said, there is also a paranoia about feminism by the dominant culture. This paranoia manifests itself in reactionary and militant efforts to ensure that the F word is never uttered, let alone discussed, in a classroom where malleable minds can be easily indoctrinated with the politics of witchery and hagdom. One such incident recently arose at the institution where I teach. In a teacher training course for first year teaching assistanceships, a new graduate student felt acutely uncomfortable with the open discussion of feminism, Marxism and feminist pedagogical strategy. After two days, she left the course and the program, articulating that she had deep philosophical differences with the way the English Department was training new teachers. Her concepts of a classroom, based on the traditional model, and her deep commitment to the ideology of the dominant culture, did not allow her to engage in critical thought or a healthy discussion about her perspective in juxtaposition to what she found offensive. But the buck didn't stop there. This person wrote a letter to the editor of the local newspapers explaining that the English Department was not only indoctrinating new teachers to feminism but brainwashing the minds of young students to the same, to the detriment of any other (read: conservative) agenda. The letter to the editor caught the eye of a conservative columnist who worked for one of the papers. He then wrote a reactionary editorial about liberal teachers imposing their feminist agenda on innocent students. The students, victims in this scenario, were robbed of a "real" education because feminism and liberal politics had become the focus of all courses. As in the satirical cartoon *The Simpsons*, the rallying cry became, "What about the *children*!"

In response to this public attack, the chair of the English Department reacted by initiating

a restructuring of the standard syllabus taught by new teachers. Instead of engaging in a public dialogue about what, in reality, went on in the teacher training courses and by extension of that, how teachers chose to teach their courses, the assumption was that the perception was correct: English teachers needed to get back to the business of teaching English, not liberal politics. The result was the creation of a rigid standard syllabus to be taught in first year writing courses (the course that most new teachers taught). The new standard syllabus no longer invited teachers to create a course from basic goals and objectives, enacting pedagogical strategies that worked for them, but outlined a course that was prescriptive right down to day to day lessons and discussion topics. In the end, the teachers lost any freedom they may have once had in the classroom, the new teaching assistants lost any ability to explore different pedagogical approaches and decide how they could best teach their students the goals and objectives of the first year writing course, and students lost the dynamic of being in a classroom where the teacher was passionate about what he was teaching. It's very difficult to get passionate about a step-by-step agenda that leaves no room for creativity or individual expression.

In this very unfortunate situation the dominant culture's fear of anything that deviated from the status quo (represented in the teaching assistant who never was and the conservative columnist) created a climate of fear in the Department Chair who, instead of supporting feminist pedagogy and articulating the difference between feminist pedagogy and teaching feminist activism, between teaching critical thinking and indoctrinating students with a single agenda, reinforced the idea that "feminist pedagogy = feminist activism = bad, very, very, bad" and bent the frame right back to the nice little square it had always been in: traditional, prescriptive pedagogy where both student and teacher are disempowered. Instead of dialoguing with teachers

in her own department about what was really going on in the classrooms and what to do about the attack from external voices, she exercised the quintessential authoritarian strategy of reacting instead of critically thinking and seeking out various perspectives and opinions. Not only was feminist pedagogy not being enacted, but neither was feminist leadership.

How can we incorporate feminist beliefs and ideologies in our teachings without becoming an autocratic feminist force oppressing our students' and their beliefs/principles? Unless the course is cross listed as "Women's Studies," it is imperative to ensure that we make room for all types of diversity, not privileging a feminist social perspective. This is a complex issue that needs to be addressed immediately and publicly by feminist teachers. Immediately and publicly; today and now. Instead of discussing these tough pedagogical issues, when feminist teachers gather, we share war stories of the football player who dismissed the attempted rape scene in Pretty Woman or the young white woman who thought The Bluest Eye was all about a little black girl who wanted blue eyes and got them, so it was a happy ending after all. Instead of critically analyzing our *own* texts (the conversations we have with each other about our resistant students, i.e. the students who don't verbalize the correct, feminist perspective or reading), we repeat the stories as cathartic experiences, gaining sympathy and consolation from one another. The risks in opening up our own conversations to critical analysis -- a feminist analysis -- seem great. Are we being true to the spirit of feminism? True to the spirit of feminist pedagogy? Or have our courses become more about a platform for specific feminist politics than about teaching students how to critically think and examine multiple sides of the issues, the complexities of human experience and personal location, to arrive at their own conclusions?

Whenever I am confronted with a moment where I really just want to zing a student who

has just made a really racist, homophobic, classist or other type of what I consider to be an offensive observation or remark, I try to get myself to pause (and sometimes the perpetual motion of that instantaneous emotional reaction to just zing the student with a feminist lightening bolt is too quick for me to pause). I take a breath. I think. How can I respond so the student will really hear what I am saying? How can I prevent the student from shutting down? I try to think what it felt like to be 18 and in a classroom of a domineering conservative white guy who had not only twenty years life experience on me, but a PhD and several books while I was just dipping my tootsie into higher education for the first time. Whenever I offered a feminist perspective in that classroom, he would fling me across the room with his words, cutting me and my silly "women's libber" ideas to the quick. I don't want to make any student feel that way. It isn't productive. It isn't feminist pedagogy. And, in fact, it won't further the feminist political agenda I believe in so deeply at all. It will only convince the student that I am a perfect manifestation of what the dominant culture has taught him feminists are: mean, angry and narrow-minded.

Sometimes I fail miserably at keeping my passion for feminist politics as one of the many perspectives instead of *the* perspective. Like when, before class began, I asked what the news of the day was and a young woman began telling me of the rape that occurred in a dorm room the previous night. When one of the young men in class said, flippantly, "Well, if she didn't want to get raped, why did she go into his dorm room?" I paused, but, I am sorry to say, not long enough. Instead of offering a different perspective gently and effectively, I snapped, "At what moment in time is it OK for me to beat the hell out of you simply because you had the nerve to enter this classroom? Assault is assault, regardless of *where* it takes place." The student shut up and rarely

spoke the rest of the semester. A huge failure on my part. It wasn't necessarily what I said, but how I said it. Instead of sending the message that I had something for the community to think about, it likely felt like a personal attack for the young man who was only communicating, uncritically, the beliefs and myths about rape perpetuated by the dominant culture. One thing I try to remember is that the dominant culture is an amazingly strong force and I shouldn't blame any 18-year-old for subscribing to those beliefs. Instead what I should work towards is presenting different perspectives and teaching students how to critically think so they can examine the dominant culture's beliefs and make their own decisions.

Although there are few intersections between feminist pedagogy and feminist activism (beyond the desire to change the patriarchal/traditional culture of education to be more empowering for the traditionally disempowered), I find many parallels between feminist pedagogy and feminist leadership. Like feminist pedagogy, feminist leadership calls upon the leader to empower members of the group and de-center the position of authority whenever possible. Feminist leadership demands that groups arrive at decisions according to consensus and only on those rare occasions when consensus cannot be reach does the leader have authority to make a decision on behalf of the community, weighing all perspectives and choices.

As a feminist leader one must facilitate meaningful discussions and make sure one voice or perspective does not dominate, making a space for every voice. She must also ensure that the community is growing and learning, that she is challenging the group to do the work required, that members are involved and feel productive. People enacting feminist leadership know that if you don't keep group members involved in meaningful work, they will become frustrated and leave the community. Delegation without micro-management is important. Feminist leaders who

take on all the work of the group themselves or micro-manage the work they do delegate, quickly find themselves without a viable community. As in a classroom community, effect leadership means keeping members productive with work they feel is valuable to the objectives or goals of the group as well as interesting to members individually.

Feminist leadership, like feminist pedagogy, is about creating a community of learners who are also working towards becoming leaders. It is mentoring and empowering people to do their best, recognizing their interests and strengths to maximize those interests and strengths. Feminist leadership allows the group to define the goals, directions and projects of the community and the leader is responsible for making sure the projects are inclusive and diverse (whose perspectives are not represented or considered in the project and how can we include that perspective). Whereas feminist leaders are guiding community members to enact their feminism in ways that change the culture of the world, feminist pedagogues are guiding community members to enact their critical thinking in ways that will change not only their lives, but the culture of the academic community. As feminist activist leaders focuses on empowering community members to do their feminist work in whatever way, shape or form the individual chooses to do that work, so does a feminist teacher empower community members to do their work in whatever way, shape or form best benefits them. Feminist leadership is a model for what leadership should be like, subverting the traditional patriarchal, autocratic leadership style. Feminist pedagogy is about subverting the traditional patriarchal, autocratic academic structure so that students, once outside the feminist classroom, begin to demand this type of empowerment in other academic situations, thereby changing the culture.

Enacting feminist leadership principles in your classroom is a part of feminist pedagogy.

Enacting feminist activism in your classroom is not. Imposing feminist politics on a captive audience is no different than opposing any sort of oppressive political agenda on a disempowered group of people. It is OK for students to know that their teacher identifies as a feminist, just as it is OK for them to know that their teacher identifies as a lesbian, a Jew, a Muslim or a dyslexic. But this shouldn't be the first thing a teacher tells his students about himself. The first thing students need to know about a teacher is that the teacher is committed to helping them learn what they feel they need to learn. That the teacher is there to offer the knowledge he has to help them further their education. That the teacher is there to empower them. The personal location information will come out, as it will for other members of the community, as the term progresses and the community gets to know each other. It is very important that students know who you are as a human being and how you define yourself. It is not important to do that all at once on the first day because people will assign you an identity according to the labels you place on yourself. This often works against you. Instead of introducing myself as, "My name is Kay and I'm your bisexual wiccan socialist feminist activist teacher," I begin by offering what my role is in the class and how I am looking forward to getting to know them. Throughout the semester the students will learn the other things about me. It's like the t-shirt that says, "This is what a feminist looks like." If they get to know other things about me before they see me as a feminist, they may have to reposition their idea of what a feminist is. If they know and respect me before they discover I identify as bisexual, they will probably have to revise the stereotypes of what they believe a bisexual is, instead of hearing the label and then cramming me into the stereotype, never to revise it.

We all have categories and labels in our heads: some positive and some negative, but they

are generally fairly narrow categories. When we hear someone identify as Christian or Muslim or Feminist or Marxist or Jewish or Gay, we cram them into the category. If we get to know something else about the person and then learn who they are and how they define themselves, it is harder to cram them into a category and be done with it. Our categories begin to broaden. We begin to understand the complexities of how we all define ourselves. Being aware of the categories and our own biases and bigotries is essential to being a feminist pedagogue.

As a small child in the Midwest I was indoctrinated with conservative Christianity. Church and Sunday School every Sunday were a steady, true aspect of my life. Choir practice. Youth Group. Church was the cornerstone of the weekend, a springboard for the week. In church I was taught women were inferior to men (unworthy of being on or approaching the alter, preaching, reading scripture, acting as ushers, offering communion). I was taught women who had abortions killed their babies and that homosexuality (or any other gender transgression) was an abomination. I was taught that God (and his son) was white and male. And, with brilliant contradiction, I was taught Jesus loved everyone and Christians are tolerant and loving. But by the time I reached college I began to realize that this type of Christianity not only had nothing to offer me, but was poisonous to who I was as a human being. And when I became a feminist activist, it seemed most of the time the people I was most actively engaged in trying to beat back so a feminist agenda could be brought forward were people who exercised their acts of hate and oppression in the name of Christianity. So, I created this category of Christian in my head, full of bias, bigotry, and stereotypes.

One semester I was forced to confront the category of Christian as I had created it and it was my feminist pedagogy that helped me do it. During introductions on the first day of class,

two students in one of my classes introduced themselves by saying, "My name is _____. Jesus Christ is my personal savior." I wanted to cram those students right into my box marked "Christian" and never deal with them again. But I couldn't. I was there to teach them. They were there to teach me.

To my close friends, I began referring to these students, Sally and Doug, as "The couple of heavy-duty, capital C, Christians in my class." My bigotry was showing out loud. But in the context of class I constantly checked myself so that Sally and Doug did not feel silenced or marginalized. I made sure their perspectives and voices were heard in every discussion. When their journals were filled with the love and grace of god as it manifested itself in their lives, I encouraged them to use more critical thought, but was vigilant about my objectiveness. I began to see Sally and Doug as open-hearted young people who I really enjoyed interacting with. I also began seeing them as individuals. Although Christian convictions were always at the center of these two students' projects and assignments and journals, they were respectful of what they were reading and learning in the course. They pushed themselves to use critical thinking and critical analysis. Sally was hesitant to write at the beginning of the semester. She had been told she couldn't write by a teacher in high school and was therefore unsure and lacking confidence. Sally was best at writing about her personal passions, so I encouraged her to go with that. Once she was expressing herself well in that regard, we worked on the critical thinking skills and critical analysis. By the end of the semester Sally had produced a portfolio that was one of the best in the class. It was full of solid writing that was passionate, personal and critical. I was not only proud of Sally, but impressed with all the work she had done. Sally often came to my office and I genuinely enjoyed having her come visit. We talked about her writing and work; she was

thrilled to discover writing could be fun and joyful work. After her experience with her high school writing teacher, she was deeply grateful that someone found her writing strong, exciting and interesting.

Doug became someone the class came to depend on for regular humor. He was quick witted and I relied on him to always bring laughter into the community. He was bright and engaged and wrote meaningfully about the texts, using wonderful critical thinking. By mid-term, both Sally and Doug were two of my favorite students in the community. When we read Stone Butch Blues I was nervous. I was nervous because I saw it as a true test of my feminist pedagogy. Could I get resistant students (students who believed homosexuality was wrong and that transgendered people were freaks) to consider a different perspective? Could I get resistant students to see that the text had value beyond any negative emotional reaction they may have? Was I foisting my feminist activist desire to get the word out about the harshness of the world for transgendered people onto my students?

The journals that rolled in for Stone Butch Blues engaged and thrilled me. Even students who could not quite understand or except the reality of transgenderism were able to approach the text critically. I was most nervous about Sally and Doug. I had come to enjoy these students so much that I feared the book would offend them or turn them off to the class. But, like the rest of the class, they engaged with the text critically and even connected some of the experiences of the protagonist, Jess, to personal experiences. Although Sally (and others in the class) did express resentment and concern over the graphic violence and sex scenes in the text, she was able to rise above that visceral response to a more intellectual, critical analysis at the heart of the text. In class we talked about concerns she, and others, had about the graphic nature of certain scenes,

working through why an author would include such graphic details, who was the intended audience, whether the book would have the same impact without the scenes. Sally and Doug were actively involved in the conversation, offering important observations and critical perspectives about the book.

At the end of the semester Doug called me one evening to say he had to miss class. He had to go home. His mother was having surgery. A brain tumor. They already knew it was malignant. I stood there with the phone to my ear, wondering what I would say. Wondering how I could possibly provide any words of comfort to this hurting man-child whose mother was sick, very sick. He apologized for having to miss class and suggested he may need to miss "a couple days." I encouraged him to be present for his mother and family. I told him the contract policy on absences would not apply in this case. I offered Doug an extension to complete his work for the course, but he declined. He said his portfolio would be ready on schedule. I told Doug to take care of himself and that my thoughts would be with him and his family. The Christian thing would have been for me to say, "I'll pray for you and your mother." But I'm not a Christian and it seemed like a false comfort to offer that.

Instead I meditated and sent healing light to Doug and his family. I wept. I didn't pray. The whole point of this story is not to paint myself as a compassionate teacher. Or someone who can rise above her bigotries because often I fail at that. It is to show that feminist pedagogy, when applied, forces one to move beyond our categories, to realize students are individuals that we need to celebrate and get to know even if they are not our philosophical soul mates. It is to show that even students who are resistant to certain texts or issues presented in the feminist classroom can be an important part of learning about that text by offering different perspectives.

It is to show that if a feminist teacher does her job right, both she and her students can move beyond their biases to critically engage with the course materials. Outside of the classroom, enacting my feminist activism, I would be escorting patients into abortion clinics while Sally and Doug would stand vigil and pray on the other side of the property line. But inside the feminist classroom we grew to know and care about each other, teaching and learning from each other. And our categories got broader because of it.

Like feminist leadership, feminist pedagogy is a way of life. It is not just reflected in how a course is constructed, but in a teacher's committment to her students and examining the choices and decisions she makes within the classroom community. It goes beyond the logistics of the classroom and syllabus construction to seeing students as individuals who the teacher is obligated to get to know. Feminist beliefs (equality and a voice for all; empowerment and taking control of one's own life, celebrating diversity) can be incorporated into teaching without the classroom becoming an autocratic feminist force. But when those feminist beliefs manifest themselves in the form of a soap box, privileging feminism over other ideologies or philosophies, you run the risk of banging up against the beliefs/principles of students who don't identify as feminists. This ultimately sabotages any feminist pedagogical or feminist activist attempt to show students feminists are not evil, hostile, or angry. Instead, it reinforced the dominant culture's definition of feminists as domineering and bad-tempered, resulting in students becoming more resistant to the F word instead of understanding, accepting, appreciating or embracing it. The difference between a feminist teacher and a teacher implementing feminist pedagogy is that the former can be making some very un-feminist decisions by denying every student a voice, not making room for all perspectives, and privileging one philosophy over all

others. Feminist pedagogy is an extension of feminist leadership, its pedagogical twin. Feminist leadership is pedagogy and feminist pedagogy is leadership.

This complicated issue of extricating or overlapping feminist pedagogy and feminist activism poses more questions than it answers, but we, people invested in feminist pedagogy and feminist leadership, need to begin thinking and talking about the difficult issues regarding feminist politics and theory in relation to feminist pedagogy practices and feminist leadership. I identify as a feminist activist, a feminist leader, and a feminist teacher, but I see these identities as different and distinct. Likewise, I hope that you, the reader of this book, will be moved to articulate and see the differences between feminist pedagogy and feminist activism as well: political worker and progressive teacher. This book is an attempt to offer suggestions and solid practical examples for the latter, and advice for interested teachers and scholars of how feminist pedagogical theory can be applied.

Looking back at the practices outlined in the previous chapters, the objective has been to get you, the teacher, to continually challenge yourself and turn a critical eye towards all the decisions you make within the classroom community. Your feminist work should encourage you to include your students in a dialogue for creating a classroom community. These two principles of critical evaluation and inviting students into the process of creating the community are the foundations on which all other feminist pedagogical principles rest. Ultimately, what matters in feminist pedagogy is a real desire by the teacher to not only be critical of his/her own pedagogy, but encourage and nurture the students to become involved in the pedagogy as well as their own education. By doing these two things in various ways, teachers are well on their way to implementing a feminist pedagogy that empowers and excites students to education and learning.

But these practices should be enacted generously, kindly, with care, with passion. With gentle rapture.

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